

Rediscovery of Scalloped Antbird *Myrmeciza ruficauda* in Minas Gerais, Brazil

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O Formigueiro-de-cauda-ruiva *Myrmeciza ruficauda* é uma espécie endêmica de baixadas da Mata Atlântica, com duas populações disjuntas, uma no sul de Alagoas e norte da Paraíba (*M. r. soror*) e outra no sul da Bahia, Espírito Santo e Minas Gerais (*M. r. ruficauda*). É uma espécie considerada ameaçada/vulnerável, cuja subespécie do sul é rara tendo sido registrada em poucas localidades e com apenas um único registro em Minas Gerais em 1920. Descrevemos aqui a redescoberta da espécie em um fragmento de mata no norte de Minas Gerais. Um macho e uma fêmea foram capturados com rede de neblina, em junho e novembro de 2001, dos quais fornecemos pesos, medidas, ocorrência de parasitas, mudas e de placas de incubação. A dieta revelou ser altamente insetívora com o notável consumo de larvas de Diptera em junho pela fêmea. A conservação desta e de outras espécies na região, como *Rhopornis ardesiaca*, é crítica uma vez que os remanescentes florestais existentes são poucos e relativamente pequenos.

Introduction

Scalloped Antbird *Myrmeciza ruficauda* is endemic to Brazil's lowland Atlantic Forest (0–600 m), where it occupies the understorey, often favouring tree-fall gaps, forest borders and secondary woodland^{7,9}. Its plumage differs from that of *M. loricata*, with which it does not overlap geographically, mainly in the lack of a white superciliary in both sexes⁸. The species is disjunct in north-east and east Brazil⁹: the nominate form, *M. r. ruficauda*, occurs in Espírito Santo (north of the rio Santa Cruz) and adjacent Minas Gerais and south Bahia, and is apparently rarer than the more northerly *M. r. soror*, which occurs in south Alagoas north to Paraíba⁵. *M. ruficauda* is considered at risk, being classified as threatened at national level³ and considered globally Vulnerable^{9,10}. Its small population and narrow range, subject to continuous habitat loss and degradation (mainly due to logging and clearance for sugarcane, pastures and agriculture) pose important threats to the species⁹.

Since its discovery, the species has been recorded at fewer than 12 locations. Its occurrence in Minas Gerais is based on a unique record made in the 1920s by Emil Kaempfer, at Resplendor, in the rio Doce valley⁴. Subsequent surveys failed to locate it in this region⁸, and it was considered 'probably extinct' in Minas Gerais³. Here we report the rediscovery of *M. ruficauda* in the north-east of the state. The nominate form has only been recorded at two other localities recently: Córrego do Veado Biological Reserve (October 1986² and March 1997, J. Goerck pers. comm.) and Sooretama Biological Reserve, Espírito Santo, where it has been regularly observed since the 1980s (see Collar *et al.*²).

New records

During two mist-netting expeditions to Fazenda Santana (16°05'S 40°02'W), in Salto da Divisa county, north-east Minas Gerais, we sampled a forest fragment of 1,100 ha on the left bank of the middle rio Jequitinhonha, at c.100 m elevation⁶. An adult female and adult male *M. ruficauda* were caught in a mist-net sited at the edge of a narrow dirt road within the forest. The female, captured on 4 June 2001, died during handling and is retained in the ornithological collection of the Universidade de Brasília, Distrito Federal (COMB-ZOO 1905). The male was caught in the same area of forest on 1 November 2001. Preliminary searches of three other small (< 20 ha) forest fragments in the region were unsuccessful in detecting the species. Nevertheless, because the species appears naturally rare within its southern range, more intensive searches are required.

Mensural and other data

The female was trapped at 12h00, weighed 22.7 g and had the following measurements: wing chord 59.7 mm, tail 56.4 mm, tarsus 23.3 mm and bill (from nostril to tip) 10.5 mm; no moult, no brood patch and no ectoparasites. A blood smear taken in the field was subsequently searched using a microscope for blood parasites, but none was found (Fabiane Sebaio pers. comm.). The male was trapped at 10h00 and released 15 minutes later, weighed 24.2 g and had the following measurements: wing chord 61.0 mm, tail 57.0 mm, tarsus 23.8 mm and bill (from nostril to tip) 10.8 mm. It too was not moulting, but had a brood patch and five lice (*Malophaga*) eggs on its head.

It is worth noting that the female had intestinal bacteria resistant to several antibiotics (Nascimento *et al.* in prep.). The species was the only one of 15 tested to have bacteria (collected with cloacal swabs) resistant to kanamycin as well as to three other antibiotics (ampicillin, chloranfenicol and streptomycin). Female stomach contents were: 32 Diptera (larvae of Stratiomyidae), six Opiliones, three Hemiptera, two Coleoptera, two Formicidae, one Hymenoptera, one Diplopoda and one Blattaria Ooteca. The species appears to be highly insectivorous, with a notable consumption of Diptera larvae by the female, probably taken in the water trapped in bromeliad leaves. Differences in stomach contents are perhaps related to seasonal variation, as the female was trapped in the dry season and the male in the wet season.

Other records

Other species recorded in the same forest fragment included Slender Antbird *Rhopornis ardesiaca*, which was only recently discovered in Minas Gerais⁶. Sooretama Slaty-antshrike *Thamnophilus ambiguus* was the most common species mist-netted, followed by White-shouldered Fire-eye *Pyriglena leucoptera*. Other understory birds frequently trapped were Lesser Woodcreeper *Lepidocolaptes fuscus*, Slender Antbird and Euler's Flycatcher *Lathrotriccus euleri*. Frugivores were uncommon in the mist-nets.

Vegetation

The topography of the region is flat and the climate sub-humid to dry, with approximately 800 mm of rain in spring/summer¹. The vegetation consists of lowland tropical deciduous forests (Floresta Estacional Decidual das Terras Baixas) similar to those in southern Bahia. Within the forest fragment we surveyed the vegetation has three layers, with the canopy reaching 30 m. Ground bromeliads *Ananas* sp. as high as 2 m are abundant and form dense cover. Thorny shrubs, lianas and slender bamboos occur where bromeliads are absent. Further details of the vegetation and photographs of the forests are provided by Ribon & Maldonado-Coelho⁶.

Remarks

The rediscovery of *M. ruficauda* in Minas Gerais is of some importance given the species' threatened status. Ribon & Maldonado-Coelho⁶ recently drew attention to the high conservation value of the forest at Fazenda Santana, where they recorded several other endangered or rare species. It should be noted that other extensive forest fragments exist on neighbouring farms, and may possibly harbour other populations of *M. ruficauda*. Currently, the Espírito Santo reserves hold the largest-known

populations of the southern race of the species. The energy crisis in Brazil is boosting the construction of new hydroelectric power dams throughout the country, and at least one dam is already planned in southern Bahia. Further such developments in this region require strong conservation action.

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Figure 1. Male Scalloped Antbird *Myrmeciza ruficauda*, Fazenda Santana, Salto da Divisa county, north-east Minas Gerais, Brazil (Miguel Ângelo Marini)

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